



NEWS RELEASE

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ONE YEAR LATER: FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS DELIVERING BENEFITS BEYOND NORTH DAKOTA FARMS AND RANCHES

BISMARCK, ND, May 5, 2003—Like most agricultural producers, North Dakota's Ken and Bonnie Miller can't quote the 600-page 2002 Farm Bill by line and verse. But the Millers know one sure thing about it: It's helped them become better stewards of the land.

They, along with hundreds of other agricultural producers across North Dakota are among the first to benefit from the conservation provisions in the 2002 Farm Bill, which was signed into law last year on May 13th by President Bush. Since that time, more than 600 producers in North Dakota have received technical and financial assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). By this time next year, NRCS officials expect a significant increase in the number of producers receiving assistance.

"I'm delighted by the overwhelming response to participate in the Farm Bill conservation programs by North Dakota producers," said NRCS State Conservationist Tom Jewett. "I'm also thankful for the hard work of our field staff in implementing these programs -- they've done a terrific job, but I also know we have a big job ahead of us," he said.

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized an unprecedented increase in program funding for conservation programs ranging from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), to the Wetlands Reserve Program, to the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. All of these programs are designed to help private landowners conserve, protect and enhance soil, water, air, and plant resources.

For the Millers that means they can focus on improving their grazing land resources in an area affected by drought conditions.

"EQIP is providing us a drought management incentive for deferred grazing. This has allowed us to remove livestock from stressed grazing land for a 12-month duration, and in turn, receive an incentive to compensate for unharvested forage," said Ken Miller. "We were concerned about our grazing resources, and this Farm Bill program has provided the assistance we needed," he said.

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“The conservation provisions in this new Farm Bill represent a historic opportunity for producers in North Dakota to voluntarily implement conservation on private lands through a variety of programs, Jewett said. “These programs help North Dakota's farmers and ranchers continue with their efforts to reduce erosion, protect cropland and grazing lands, and improve watershed health, water quality and wildlife habitat,” he said.

"I urge North Dakota's landowners with natural resource concerns to contact our local offices to take advantage of this historic opportunity," Jewett said. "The first year has been a success," he said, "but we're all looking forward to getting a lot more conservation on the ground in North Dakota throughout the life of the Farm Bill."