

Contact:  
Joanna Pope, NRCS Public Affairs Officer  
(402) 437-4123

## **NEBRASKA NRCS PROVIDES ASSISTANCE TO FARMERS IN DROUGHT AREAS**

### *Financial and technical assistance available through the Drought Relief Special Initiative.*

LINCOLN, August 2, 2012 - Craig Derickson, State Conservationist of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service announced today that NRCS is available to provide assistance to farmers and ranchers through the Drought Relief Special Initiative. Producers may apply for assistance August 6 - 15, 2012.

Derickson said, "The prolonged lack of rainfall combined with excessive heat has resulted in a dramatic reduction in available forage for livestock producers and increased the risk of soil erosion on land without sufficient ground cover. The purpose of this initiative is to offer assistance to farmers and ranchers impacted by the drought."

The Drought Relief Special Initiative assistance will be available for land located in any part of a county that has been designated a D3 (Extreme) or D4 (Exceptional) drought zone, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor map dated July 24, 2012, or later. Drought Monitor maps are available on line [http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/DM\\_state.htm?NE,HP](http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/DM_state.htm?NE,HP), and are updated every Thursday morning.

"Through this special initiative, farmers and ranchers may apply for assistance to install conservation practices that can help reduce the negative impacts of the current drought, and will help improve the sustainability of their operation in the long run," Derickson said.

Conservation practices available to producers through the Drought Relief Special Initiative include: cover crops, critical area planting, fencing, deferred grazing, forage and biomass planting, pipeline, well and pumping stations for livestock water, range planting and more. Interested participants are encouraged to visit their local NRCS field office to learn more about the assistance available.

- more -

Helping People Help the Land

“When implemented, these conservation practices will provide additional forage, improve existing forage, and help increase ground cover,” Derickson said.

In addition to the Drought Relief Special Initiative, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently announced new flexibility in managing the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced earlier this week that farmers and ranchers can modify current EQIP contracts to re-schedule planned conservation practices until drought conditions improve.

Vilsack’s announcement also included expediting Compatible Use Authorization requests for haying or grazing WRP easements in drought-affected areas where such haying or grazing is consistent with the conservation of wildlife habitat and wetlands.

Producers who are not currently participating in EQIP or WRP are still encouraged to visit with NRCS if they need to make critical changes to their operation, or are planning to make changes to their crop rotation, tillage practices or make use of cover crops to improve soil health. Additionally, producers wanting to install any engineered conservation practices like terraces or dams should visit with NRCS since drought conditions impact the construction of these practices.

According to NRCS guidelines, a drought falls under the category of natural disaster, which gives the Agency some additional options to work with producers.

Derickson said, “Farmers and ranchers that have conservation plans or are participating in other Farm Bill conservation programs will have some flexibility in meeting their obligations. Contracts will be reviewed by NRCS and modified as needed. If producers have questions about how this drought may affect their conservation plan or their operation in general, come in and visit with NRCS.”

More information about drought assistance and specific Farm Bill programs can be found at [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov). Locate your nearest NRCS field office at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>.

#

Helping People Help the Land

An Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer