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## **DRAINING WETLANDS COULD COST PRODUCERS USDA PROGRAM BENEFITS**

### ***USDA reminds producers to check conservation compliance rules before draining wetlands.***

LINCOLN, Jan. 11, 2013 – Nebraska farmers are urged to talk with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) officials before draining any wet areas or bringing new land into production. NRCS State Resource Conservationist Shaun Vickers says farmers are under tremendous economic pressure to produce crops, which may cause growers to consider altering wetland areas to make them more farmable.

As farmers prepare for the upcoming planting season, they should be cautious with draining, altering or filling wetlands in their fields, says Vickers, since their eligibility for USDA farm program benefits could be at stake.

“If you have a wet area which you’re considering altering, come in and talk to the NRCS staff. We can do a wetland determination to know if that area is a wetland or not and keep you in compliance with your current conservation plan,” says Vickers. “The ramifications of altering wetlands can be significant in terms of the potential for losing USDA financial assistance and also in the amount of time that it takes to resolve unapproved alterations.”

Since the 1985 Farm Bill was passed, there have been provisions in place to protect wetlands and highly erodible cropland. Farming a wetland under natural conditions is not a violation. However, Vickers explains, “Draining, tiling, altering or filling a wetland for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity causes the farmer to become ineligible for USDA program benefits.” Vickers says, “It is better to find out where your USDA defined wetlands are located and the potential consequences of altering them so as to avoid confusion later.”

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Some maintenance activities are allowed; however, producers should be careful to make sure the extent of the original manipulation is not exceeded. “The best thing to do is check with your local NRCS office before taking action around wetlands,” says Vickers.

Vickers says producers shouldn’t wait to visit with NRCS conservation staff. Some eastern Nebraska counties have several wetland determination requests already on hand, so the earlier communication begins, the better.

Landowners are also encouraged to visit NRCS staff about voluntary conservation programs that provide farmers payments for preserving or restoring wetlands. Landowners benefit by retaining ownership and access to their land. They no longer try to farm marginal cropland, and have possible income opportunities from recreation, grazing or haying. During 2012, over 4,000 acres of wetlands were restored across Nebraska with NRCS assistance.

For more information about wetlands, conservation programs or compliance issues, visit your local NRCS field office or [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov).

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