

Ogallala Aquifer Initiative

2016 Progress Report

Underlying the Great Plains in eight states, the Ogallala supports nearly one-fifth of the wheat, corn, cotton and cattle produced in the United States. It has long been the main water supply for the High Plains' population and is being used at an unsustainable rate. The reservoir was created more than a million years ago through geologic action and covers about 174,000 square miles.

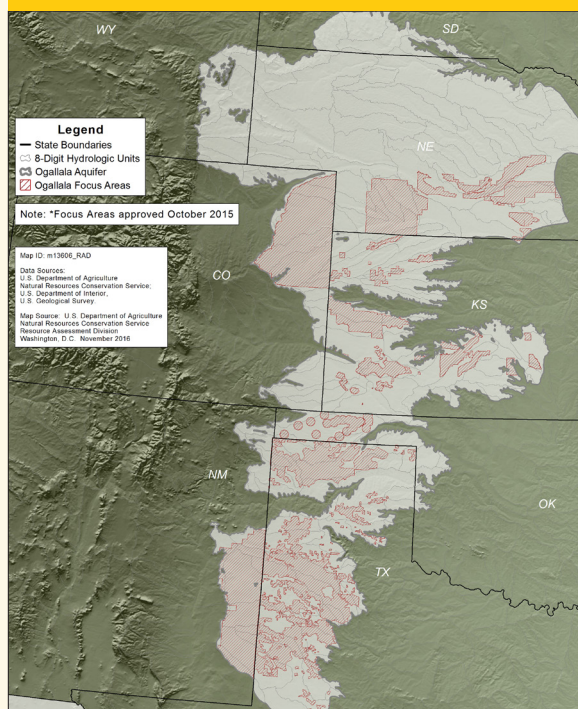
Using a comprehensive set of conservation practices, the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI) aims to reduce aquifer water use, improve water quality and enhance the economic viability of croplands and rangelands in Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, New Mexico, Texas, South Dakota and Wyoming.

NRCS and the Ogallala Aquifer

Conservation activities are targeted in focus areas where NRCS and partners have identified projects that conserve water and strengthen agricultural operations. NRCS provides agricultural producers with technical and financial assistance to implement a variety of conservation practices, including improving irrigation efficiency, managing nutrients, implementing prescribed grazing and other conservation systems. Funding comes from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and partners typically leverage additional funds in focus areas.

During fiscal years 2011-2014, OAI addressed water quantity and water quality concerns in wide-ranging targeted areas in eight states that occupy the Ogallala Aquifer region. Starting in 2015, funds were targeted to smaller focus areas identified by state and local partners as high priorities for OAI technical and financial assistance. NRCS and these partners work with producers to plan and implement conservation systems that result in meaningful water conservation benefits in those focus areas. These efforts can also reduce leaching of nutrients to drinking water sources.

FOCUS AREAS



Outcomes and Impacts

By improving irrigating efficiency and implementing conservation systems, producers benefit from using less inputs. Improved water management reduces expenditures for energy, chemicals and labor inputs, while enhancing revenues through higher crop yields and improved crop quality. Additionally these efforts help maintain the long-term viability of the irrigated agricultural sector and offset the effect of rising water costs and restricted water supplies on producer income.

By conserving water, the useful life of the aquifer may be extended, flow is increased in rivers, benefiting wildlife like the least tern, whooping crane, pallid sturgeon and piping plover.

OAI provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to improve irrigation efficiencies.



Fiscal Year 2016 Ogallala Aquifer Initiative NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) for Active and Completed contracts

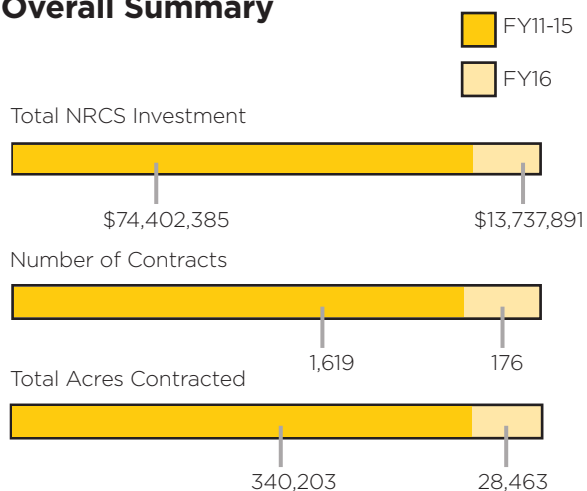
State	Focus Area	Acres	NRCS Investment	Contracts
Colorado	Northern High Plains	5,622	\$560,354	9
Kansas	OAI High Priority Area	1,405	\$1,164,050	10
Nebraska	Central Platte Natural Resource District	1,216	\$937,687	18
Nebraska	Little Blue Natural Resource District	2,295	\$767,976	18
Nebraska	Middle Republican Natural Resource District	2,416	\$776,948	29
Nebraska	Upper Big Blue Natural Resource District	2,991	\$778,249	27
Oklahoma	Ogallala Aquifer Initiative	2,834	\$1,516,383	8
New Mexico	Eastern New Mexico	2,144	\$2,625,180	11
Texas	OAI Partnership	7,540	\$4,611,064	46
Total		28,463	\$13,737,891	176

Data source: NRCS Resource Economics, Analysis and Policy Division, November 2016.

NRCS Goals

The overall goal of OAI is to reduce withdrawals of water and support local projects that demonstrate how agriculture can be productive and sustainable in the Ogallala region. To achieve this, NRCS has set five milestones for its work with producers and partners to complete by 2018. These milestones include the conservation of 102,320 acre-feet of water, improving irrigation efficiency on 49,400 acres, converting operations to dryland farming on 30,350 acres, installing 202 irrigation water management systems, and applying nutrient management on 21,000 acres.

Overall Summary



2018 Milestones:

