

## NRCS offers help with available programs

**By Janet Lagler**

*Natural Resources Conservation Service*

We can't change the weather, but we can be ready for it.

Every day, NRCS is closely monitoring the drought and assisting farmers and ranchers with implementing voluntary conservation practices that help alleviate the drought's effects.

Conservation can't wait. Without it we risk losing our crops, our livestock and our American farmers.

NRCS has the science-based solutions and technical experts on the ground today to help farmers and ranchers through this drought and to prepare our country for weather events in the future.

NRCS offers financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to cope with drought across the nation.

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
- Emergency Watershed Protection Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to address natural resource concerns on agricultural and forest land.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has granted permission for drought-stricken farmers and ranchers to modify current EQIP contracts to re-schedule planned conservation practices until drought conditions improve. In the short term, funding will be targeted toward hardest hit drought areas.

Conservation plans will emphasize improving each soil's capacity to be more drought-resilient. Particular conservation practices that will be employed include residue management practices, such as mulch till and no-till, cover crops, mulching, and crop rotation.

NRCS will work closely with producers to ensure successful implementation of planned conservation practices. Where conservation activities have failed because of drought, NRCS will look for opportunities to work with farmers and ranchers to re-apply those activities.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

WHIP is a voluntary program for conservation-minded landowners who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat on agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Tribal land.

Many WHIP practices can improve wildlife habitat and alleviate drought conditions. These practices include mulch till and no-till, cover crops, mulching and crop rotation, livestock watering facilities, silvopasture establishment, riparian forest buffers and windbreaks.

For livestock producers, WHIP can be used for prescribed grazing to prevent overgrazing of drought-stressed pastures and invasive weed growth.

**Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)**

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program helps communities address hazardous watershed impairments.

EWP can be used to re-seed drought stricken areas that would be prone to erosion and could potentially pose a threat to life or property.

**Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)**

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property.

Agricultural Secretary Vilsack is expediting Compatible Use Authorization (CUA) requests for haying or grazing of WRP easements in drought-affected areas where such haying or grazing is consistent with conservation of wildlife habitat and wetlands.

For landowners with land currently enrolled in WRP, the CUA process provides NRCS and affected producers the management flexibility to address short-term resource conditions in a manner that promotes both the health of the land and the viability of the overall farming operation.

For further information please contact your local NRCS office at 352-4776 ext. 3.

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