ALPHABET SOUP — A GUIDE TO NRCS PROGRAMS

Leah Carson, Rangeland Management Specialist—Theford NRCS Service Center
Anna Ferguson, Soil Conservationist—Rushville NRCS Service Center

Objectives

- General Agency Overview
- Programs & Practices Available
- Success Stories
- Questions??
NRD, FSA or NRCS?

“A flower bed isn’t enough — You have to own a farm before we can pay you for not growing things.”

Agency Overview

- NRD—Natural Resource Districts
- FSA—Farm Service Agency
- NRCS—Natural Resource Conservation Service
Natural Resource District--NRD

- 23 NRDs
  Statewide

- State agency
- Operated under the Department of Natural Resources
- Board of Directors are elected by the population
- NRD is divided into sub-districts. Directors elected from each sub district
- Local taxes = local control
- Responsible for groundwater management and monitoring
- Funding Programs:
  - NSWCP—Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program
  - Nebraska Buffer Strip Program
  - Tree Planting program
  - Not all offered in all NRD’s
NSWCP (Nebraska Soil and Water Conservation Program)

- Funding comes from property taxes paid in each county—1.5-2% of total local property taxes
- Money dispersed to each NRD (Natural Resource District)
- Each NRD sets the priorities for funding based on resource concerns within NRD boundary

Nebraska Buffer Strip Program

- Installing filter strips along water bodies/courses to prevent nutrients from entering water
- Annual payment based on CRP rental rates
- Seed is not cost-shared to plant the filter strip
- Not offered state-wide
Tree planting—completed through NSWCP

- Cost-share for planting windbreaks, installing fabric mulch, and drip systems
- NRD's well known for planting windbreaks/shelterbelts in Nebraska

Agency Overview

- NRD—Natural Resource Districts
- FSA—Farm Service Agency
- NRCS—Natural Resource Conservation Service
FSA Farm Service Agency

- Agency under USDA—generally housed with NRCS in a Service Center
- The Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers farm commodity, crop insurance, credit, environmental, conservation, and emergency assistance programs for farmers and ranchers.
- Administers the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

FSA—Farm Service Agency continued-

- Eligibility for all farm programs is determined by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) formerly ASCS offices.
- All eligibility is based on rules from the Farm Bill
- Required for all programs administered by NRCS and FSA
Eligibility for Programs....

- Must be engaged in agricultural production or forestry management, or have an interest in the agricultural or forestry operation being offered for enrollment.
- Must have signature authority if you are enrolling as an entity.
- Must be in compliance with HEL (highly erodible land) and wetland conservation compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985.

Any Questions, Thus Far???

If you don’t think fear can control you, then you’ve never been chased by a mad mama cow.

www.save-the-cowboy.com
Agency Overview

- NRD—Natural Resource Districts
- FSA—Farm Service Agency
- NRCS—Natural Resource Conservation Service

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the primary federal agency that works with private landowners to help them conserve, maintain and improve their natural resources. The Agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based conservation; technical assistance; partnerships; incentive-based programs; and cooperative problem solving at the community level.
Land Eligibility for NRCS Programs

- Must be privately owned, Indian land, agricultural land, non-industrial private forest land or other land on which agricultural products, livestock, or forest-related products are produced.
- Must have an identified natural resource concern that may be addressed.
- Must have documented control of the land for enrollment for the term of the proposed contract period—deed, lease, agreement, etc.

Land Eligibility Continued

- If applying for water conservation and irrigation practices, the land must have been irrigated for 2 of the last 5 years.
- Cannot increase irrigated acres through NRCS programs
Natural Resource Concerns:

- Soil Erosion - Sheet, rill, wind and concentrated flow
- Soil Quality Degradation - compaction, organic matter
- Insufficient water for livestock and irrigation
- Water quality - excess nutrients, pesticides, pathogens and sediment in ground water and surface water
- Habitat for fish and wildlife
- Livestock production limitations — feed/forage, shelter, and water
- Insufficient energy
- Air Quality Impacts/Emissions

Federal Programs

- NRCS Programs
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - Conservation Stewardship (CSP)
  - Easement Programs (ACEP)
  - Conservation Technical Assistance
  - Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP)

- Voluntary conservation program
- Provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers
- Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, private non-industrial forestland, and other farm or ranch lands
- Continuous Sign-up—sign up at any time during the year
EQIP Fund Pools/Special Initiatives

- General
- Nebraska Forestry Special Initiative
- Rangeland Health Demonstration
- Organic Initiative
- Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative
- Conservation Activity Plans
- On-Farm Energy Initiative
- Wildlife Initiative Nebraska
- Water Quality Degradation-AFO
- Ogallala Initiative
- Ephemeral Gully Control Initiative
- NE Northwest Landscape Initiative
- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan
- Prescribed Burn

Livestock Watering Systems

Installation of well, pumping plants (solar, wind, electric), rural water hook-up, tanks, pipelines for improved grazing management.
Fencing

- Fencing to divide pastures into smaller grazing units,
- Fence out sensitive areas,
- Prevent livestock access to windbreaks,
- Fence out CRP fields after expiration, for use in a grazing system

Types –
- standard barbed wire, suspension or permanent electric (minimum 2 wires)
Types of Fence

- Creosote posts & barbed wire
- Cedar posts & barbed wire
- Solar charger & Permeant electric fence

Invasive Species Control

- Mechanical, chemical or a combination to remove invasive species in uplands and riparian areas.
- Prescribed burning can also be utilized for controlling invasive species such as Eastern Red Cedar
Grazing Systems

- Not specifically cost-shared, other than for the infrastructure to implement a grazing plan.
- Financial assistance may be available in some instances.
  - Check with local NRCS office for more information.

Technical assistance is available for the development of a grazing plan/system.

Grazing system maps

- Grazing system map
- Ecological Site map
Easter Fun...

Windbreaks/Shelterbelts

Windbreaks/Shelterbelts for livestock, farmstead or feedlot protection, living snow fence, and wildlife habitat. Fencing, water conservation mulch, and drip systems also available.
Forestry Practices

- Forest Stand Improvement
  - Thinning
- Fuel breaks

Cropland Management Practices

- Residue Management
  - No-till/Strip-till
- Incentive practices
  - Pest Mgmt
  - Nutrient Mgmt
  - Irrigation Water Mgmt
- Organic farming
Soil Erosion Control

- Terraces
- Waterway
- Underground outlets
- Water & sediment control basin
- Contour farming
- Critical area planting
- Pasture & Hayland planting

Crop Rotations/Cover Crops

- What are your conservation & economic objectives… then determine species!

- Cover Crops
  - Multi-species vs Single species
  - Erosion control
  - Improve soil physical & biological properties
  - Suppress weeds
  - Increase organic matter
  - Grazing options
  - And the list goes on….
Multi-species cover crops

Water Erosion
Wind Erosion

Soil Erosion Control

- Structural practices
  - Storage Terraces
  - Underground outlets
  - Waterways
  - Water & Sediment Control Basins
  - Dike

- Vegetative practices
  - Crop rotations
  - Contour farming
  - No-till / minimum till
  - Cover crops
  - Critical Area Planting
Soil Erosion Control

• Gradient terraces outlet water into grassed waterway

Water Quality

- Filter Strips
- Nutrient Management
- Pest Management
- Contour buffer strips
- Animal Feeding Operations (AFO/CAFO)
  - Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP)
  - Waste Storage Facility
  - Vegetative treatment area
Water Quantity - Irrigation

- Must improve irrigation efficiency
- Cannot increase irrigated acres through NRCS programs

Irrigation conversion

- Irrigation Water Management
  - Producer documents
    - rainfall
    - irrigation events

- Gravity → Pivot, VRI, SDI
  - VRI – variable rate irrigation
  - SDI – subsurface drip irrigation
  - Drop nozzles on pivots
SDI – Subsurface Drip Irrigation

Seasonal High Tunnels

- Land eligibility
  - Currently in cultivation, or presently capable of being planted
  - Quonset vs Gothic Style
  - Crops must be planted into the ground
  - NRCS standards allow only for pre-fabricated high tunnel system kits
Seasonal High Tunnels

- Greater plant yield potential
- Crop mix diversity
- Cost effective
- Reduced reliance on pesticides
- Compatible with organic production practices
- Better disease control
- Water control
- 4-8 weeks earlier production in the spring
- 2-5 weeks later possible production in the fall
- Grow crops not usually grown in the area

Windbreaks

- Living Snow Fence
- Windbreak renovation
- Shelterbelt & Field Windbreak
- Fabric Mulch Installation
Wildlife Habitat Development

- Pollinator habitat
- No-till drill
- Prairie restoration
- Field borders & filter strips

Wetland Wildlife Habitat

- Wetland Restoration
- EQIP, CSP, WREP
- Wetland enhancement
- Wetland creation
EQIP Information

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

“New safety regulations won’t allow us to think outside of the box anymore because boxes have sharp corners.”
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- Evaluates current management system and natural resources on the land
- Enhancements are available to improve current management system
- Offers annual incentive payments for installing practices/enhancements

Annual Payments

- Based on number of resource concerns met at the time of application for each land use--$350 per resource concern met.
- Additional Activity Payments
  - Crop, Pastured Cropland, and Farmstead $7.50 per acre
  - Pasture $3.00 per acre
  - Range $1.00 per acre
  - Forest and Associated Agricultural Land $0.50 per acre
Supplemental Payments

- In addition to the existing and additional activity payments, producers who choose to adopt or improve a resource-conserving crop rotation as part of their CSP contract will receive a supplemental payment for these activities.

Common CSP Enhancements for Rangeland/Pastureland

- Wildlife friendly grazing
- Rangeland health assessments
- Monitoring rangeland
- Wildlife friendly fencing
- Seeding legumes/native grasses into meadows
- Planting pollinator habitat
- Preventing livestock access to streams/water bodies
- Brush/weed management
- Patch/Prescribed Burning
- Tree/Shrub Planting
- Remove old buildings/trees from pastures
### Common CSP Enhancements for Cropland

- Cover crops
- Pollinator/Monarch Butterfly habitat
- Conservation Crop rotations
- Range/pasture planting
- Precision Ag technologies
- Reduced tillage
- No-till farming
- Integrated pest management
- Tree/shrub planting
- Wetland enhancement
- Soil moisture sensors and irrigation water management
- Pump evaluations and VFD installations
- Filter strip and field border enhancements

### Common CSP Enhancements for Wildlife / Associated Agland

- Tree/shrub planting
- Pollinator/Monarch Butterfly habitat
- Install VFD pump
- Field border/filter strip enhancement
- Riparian buffers—forest/herbaceous
- Stream corridor improvement
- Fishpond management
- Stream habitat improvement
- Manage livestock access to streams, ditches, and other waterbodies
- Forage planting for bird habitat
Common CSP Enhancements for Farmstead/Headquarters

- Tree/shrub planting
- Pollinator/Monarch Butterfly habitat
- Install VFD pump
- Riparian area improvement/enhancement
- Filter strip
- Fishpond mgmt
- Manage livestock access to water bodies/courses
- Wildlife corridor establishment
- Food producing trees/shrubs

Common CSP Enhancements for Forestland--NIPF

- Tree/shrub planting for wildlife
- Pollinator/Monarch Butterfly habitat
- Patch and Prescribed Burning
- Reduce fuel load
- Grazing maintained fuel break
- Improving structural diversity
- Riparian forest buffer enhancement
- Stream habitat improvement
- Manage livestock access to streams/water bodies
- Food producing trees/shrubs
For More Information...

EASEMENT Programs

- Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)
## WREP (Wetland Reserve Easement Partnership)

- Voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring eligible land from agriculture.
- No easement shall be created on land that has changed ownership during the preceding 7 years.
- Enrollment Options:
  - Permanent Easement
  - 30 Year Easement
  - 30 Year contract

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*Wetland Creation, Wetland Enhance, Wetland Restoration*

*Never Irritate A Woman Who Can Operate A Backhoe*
CTA (Conservation Technical Assistance)

- Voluntary program for anyone interested in conservation
- No cost share funds, eligibility forms, etc. involved
- Available at any NRCS office in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Guam

CTA (Conservation Technical Assistance)

- Free access to:
  - Foresters
  - Engineers
  - Agronomists
  - Irrigation specialist
  - Wildlife biologists
  - Grazing Land specialist
  - CNMP Specialist
  - Cultural Resource Specialist
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Farm the best, conserve the rest
- NRCS takes care of technical part of program, FSA is lead agency for CRP.
- No enrollment available at this time, stay tuned.

CRP practices

- 3 goals
  - Reduce Soil Erosion
  - Improve Water Quality
  - Effect Wildlife Benefits
- General CRP
- Continuous CRP
  - Stream buffers
  - Field edges
  - HELI Initiative
  - Windbreaks
  - Grass waterways
  - Riparian buffers
  - Cross-wind trap strips
  - Grass strips on terraces
  - Wetland restoration
Grassland CRP (GCRP)

- FSA Program
- Enrollment Options:
  - Rental Contracts
    - 15-year contract
    - Annual payment
    - Payment rates are county specific
    - Only 2 million acres nationwide
    - NRCS grazing plan required
    - Eligible land use
      - Rangeland / Pastures
      - Grass/Native Hayland
So....are you interested in applying?

- Visit your local USDA Service Center
- Items to take with you....
  - Proof of control of the land
    - Tax statements, lease agreements, etc.
  - Social Security or Tax Identification Number
  - If you are applying as an entity, you will need to provide information documenting who has the authority to sign/represent the entity.
    - Corporate papers—FSA will more than likely have you complete a CCC901—so you will need all the members SSN, address, % share and signature authority.

Any Questions??
Success Stories….Women in Ag

- Real life examples...
  - Combining NRCS programs and conservation practices
    - Collaboration with CSP & EQIP cover crops
    - Grazing program success
    - Cropland management practices

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