

Land & Legacy

A PUBLICATION FOR LANDOWNERS IN THE UPPER BIG BLUE NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT

ISSUE 03 | NOVEMBER 2026

Hello, neighbor!

Agriculture is at the heart of Nebraska's economy. Healthy soil, clean and abundant water, diverse wildlife habitat, and resilient landscapes are essential to agriculture's long-term success. Ensuring that your farm remains productive for future generations will depend on how you manage the land and natural resources while they are under your care. However, you may have asked yourself, "What is the best way to do this? How do I manage my land with both the present and future in mind?"

The answer will not be the same for everyone, but asking questions and engaging in conversations is a good place to start. What condition do I want the land to be in for future generations? What operational changes should I make to achieve that vision? Do I need to talk with my family, eventual heirs, and/or tenant to ensure we have a shared vision?

If there is a change you'd like to make but are concerned about how it will turn out, talk to fellow landowners and be prepared for some trial and error on your way to success. There are a variety of programs and options highlighted in this newsletter that may help, such as peer-to-peer education networks, grant opportunities, on-farm research, and cost-share programs. Regardless of the path you choose, the Upper Big Blue NRD looks forward to working with you as we strive to protect our natural resources for the long-term health and welfare of the people of the district.



John Miller
Board Chairperson
Upper Big Blue NRD

~John Miller

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District Groundwater Levels

The Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District (NRD) sits above the High Plains Aquifer (also known as the Ogallala Aquifer), which stretches from South Dakota to Texas. This portion of the aquifer is dynamic and factors like rainfall and pumping affect the amount of water in the aquifer. Each spring, Upper Big Blue NRD staff take measurements from a network of wells across the district and report on the status of the local groundwater level. This information helps assess the status of the aquifer on which most Nebraskans depend on for domestic, agricultural, municipal, and industrial water uses. Without a properly managed aquifer, large-scale, long-term agriculture would not be possible.

Data analysis based on annual producer reports showed the average groundwater use across the district during the previous (2025) growing season was 4.49 inches per acre, which is below the average of 6.10 inches per acre as calculated since 2007. Despite below-average usage, spring 2026 measurements showed the average groundwater level within the district decreased 0.10 feet from spring 2025. This is the fifth consecutive year of declines across the district, but the level still remains 3.11 feet above the "Allocation Trigger."

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Connect Through Peer-to-Peer Education

This article is adapted from the Nebraska Conservation Mentorship Network Yearbook *published by the Center for Rural Affairs. The booklet can be accessed at www.cfra.org/publications.*

WHY PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION MATTERS *by Andrew Tonnies, Policy Associate, Center for Rural Affairs*

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to farming and ranching, and the implementation of conservation is no different. What works for one farmer may not work for his or her neighbor five miles down the road. What does work, however, is having someone to talk to who knows the nuances of being an agricultural producer and can speak to soil type, micro-climate, and needs of a specific piece of ground.

The implementation of conservation practices can be a risky business, one that may not be favorable to the eyes of curious neighbors, so sometimes it is challenging to find someone in your backyard who shares the same values and beliefs in sustainable practices. The **Nebraska Conservation Mentorship Network (Network)** is designed to make our state feel a bit smaller and help producers locate like-minded individuals to talk about challenges, identify solutions, and celebrate wins.

ABOUT THE NETWORK

The Network was launched in 2024 and is conducted in partnership with The Nature Conservancy, the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment, and the Center for Rural Affairs. Its purpose is to facilitate peer-to-peer relationships among Nebraska's farmers and ranchers that foster learning and advance the adoption of conservation practices.



MENTORS

To accommodate the diverse needs of participants and geography of the state, mentors from across Nebraska have been selected to participate in network activities and provide one-on-one guidance to producers interested in adopting sustainable agriculture practices. The mentors have graciously volunteered to put their own ideas, expertise, and experiences on display for others through field days, webinars, small-group discussions, and one-on-one conversations.

Jordan Uldrich (*pictured left*) is one such mentor who lives within the Upper Big Blue NRD. A fifth generation farmer from Milligan, Nebraska, Jordan works to build soil health through a holistic, systematic approach on his corn and soybean operation. Through a combination of conservation practices, he is experimenting with systems that use cover crops as a tool for weed suppression and

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Save Your Soil - Incentive Program Updates

In 2018, the Upper Big Blue NRD joined the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources and the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (each state agency so named at the time prior to merging into the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment in 2025) for a district-wide water planning effort. The engineering firm JEO was contracted to help with this first-of-its-kind project that jointly addressed water quality and quantity in the same plan. The resulting **Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP)** and draft Voluntary Integrated Management Plan were the results of this effort.

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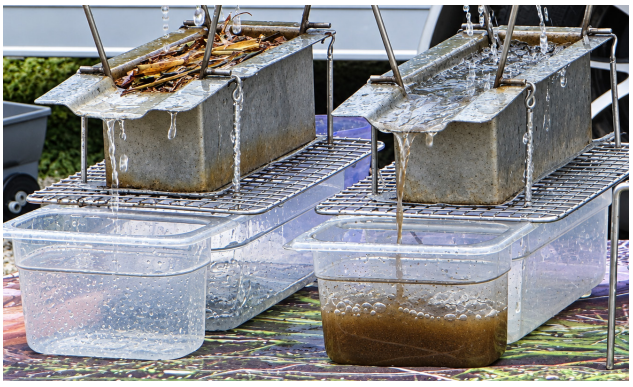

Pictured right: During the Soil Health and Garden Workshop held April 2026, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) used the Rainfall Simulator to show participants how cover-crops and no-till help reduce run-off and erosion. The pan on the right represented a bare field that had been tilled, and the resulting run-off was brown and full of sediment. The pan on the left represented a field that had not been tilled, and there was more water infiltration and very little soil loss.

NEBRASKA ON-FARM RESEARCH NETWORK

Reliable, Research-Based Information for Your Farming Decisions.

The Nebraska On-Farm Research Network is a program of Nebraska Extension that partners with Nebraska farmers to evaluate agricultural practices that are applicable to their operation by researching topics that they choose, on their fields, and with their equipment.

OUR GOAL

is to help farmers increase farm productivity, profitability and sustainability while researching key topics in agriculture.

By working with On-Farm Research, you can be confident that your research experience is backed by a team of professionals ready to assist you each step of the way. Some things that you should know about working with the Nebraska On-Farm Research Network are...

- Extension personnel provide technical assistance with project set-up, data collection, and analysis.
- Scientifically sound experimental designs are used to account for natural and manmade field variables and are customized for individual farmer needs.
- Statistical analysis is conducted to determine the significance of the results.
- Ag technologies such as prescriptions, as-applied data, and yield monitor data make conducting on-farm research convenient and provide even more powerful insights for growers.
- Results are shared with peers at in-person meetings and online. On-Farm Research is a great way to obtain answers to your questions while also helping provide data that helps your peers with decision-making.
- Farmers saved between 45-52 lb N/ac over the years 2021-2025, using sensor-based technology via Sentinel Ag in their on-farm research projects.
- In the past 2 years, farmers within the UBBNRD worked with Nebraska Extension to complete 53 on-farm research projects on topics such as soybean seed treatments, nitrogen management, cover crops, and much more!

ARE YOU INTRESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN ON-FARM RESEARCH? CONTACT US TO GET CONNECTED:

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Nebraska On-Farm Research Network

Drones: A Tool for Windbreak Assessments

By Raymond Asamoah, Conservation Forester, Upper Big Blue NRD and Nebraska Forest Service

Healthy windbreaks are one of the most valuable conservation investments on Nebraska farms and ranches. They protect crops, livestock, homes, and farmsteads from strong winds, reduce soil erosion, improve snow distribution, provide wildlife habitat, and enhance the beauty of rural landscapes. Like any long-term investment, however, windbreaks require periodic evaluation to ensure they continue providing these important benefits.

At the Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District (NRD) and the Nebraska Forest Service, field visits remain an essential part of evaluating windbreaks. Recently, however, drones have become another valuable tool that helps conservation professionals assess windbreaks more efficiently and from a completely different perspective.

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Walking through a windbreak provides valuable information about individual trees, but it can sometimes be difficult to see the condition of the entire planting. A drone equipped with a high-resolution camera can capture detailed aerial images of an entire windbreak in just a few minutes.

These images allow conservation staff to evaluate the windbreak as a whole, making it easier to identify areas where trees have died, gaps have formed, invasive vegetation is spreading, or storm damage has occurred. The aerial perspective often reveals patterns that are difficult to recognize while standing on the ground.

HOW DRONE IMAGERY CAN HELP

Drone imagery can support windbreak evaluations by helping conservation professionals:

- Identify gaps where tree replacement may be needed.
- Monitor tree survival following new plantings.
- Evaluate overall canopy condition and growth.
- Detect damage from storms, drought, or other environmental stresses.
- Observe vegetation encroachment that may compete with young trees.
- Create high-quality aerial records that can be compared over time to monitor changes.

These aerial images also provide an excellent visual reference during discussions with landowners when planning renovations or future conservation projects.

SUPPORTING BETTER CONSERVATION DECISIONS

One of the greatest advantages of drone technology is its ability to quickly cover larger windbreaks that would otherwise require significant time to inspect on foot. The detailed imagery helps conservation professionals focus field inspections on areas that may require closer attention, making the assessment process more efficient.

This technology is especially valuable after severe weather events, when multiple properties may need to be evaluated within a short period.



DRONES DO NOT REPLACE FIELD VISITS

While drones provide an excellent aerial perspective, they are only one part of a complete windbreak assessment.

Many issues including insect damage, diseases, irrigation problems, wildlife damage, or trunk injuries can only be confirmed through an on-site inspection. For that reason, the best assessments combine drone imagery with traditional field observations.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As drone technology continues to advance, it is becoming an increasingly valuable resource for conservation work across Nebraska. High-resolution imagery, improved mapping capabilities, and emerging image analysis tools will continue to enhance how windbreaks are monitored and managed.

By combining decades of forestry expertise with modern technology, the Upper Big Blue NRD and Nebraska Forest Service are working to provide landowners with more accurate information, better planning tools, and practical recommendations to help ensure windbreaks remain healthy and effective for years to come.

If you are interested in evaluating the condition of your windbreak or are considering renovating or establishing a new one, contact Raymond Asamoah, Conservation Forester, Upper Big Blue NRD and Nebraska Forest Service, at (402) 362-6601. We are always happy to discuss conservation options and help you develop a plan that meets your property's needs. ♦♦♦

Opposite top and right: A drone equipped with a high-resolution camera can capture detailed aerial images of an entire windbreak from different perspectives in just a few minutes.

Opposite bottom: Different types of imagery analysis help conservation professionals evaluate certain windbreak characteristics that are difficult to assess from ground-level. The analysis pictured here helps prioritize areas where management efforts need to be directed based on low-density or open canopy cover.

Plant Today, Protect Tomorrow

Upper Big Blue NRD Conservation Tree Program

Strong winds. Harsh winters. Dry summers. In Nebraska, the right trees don't just add beauty; they provide protection, conserve soil, reduce energy costs, and create important wildlife habitat. Trees are an important investment for your farmstead that will provide lastings benefits for generations to come.



That's why the Upper Big Blue NRD Conservation Tree Program exists, to help landowners plant hardy, affordable trees that are built to thrive in our region. The NRD offers high-quality, climate-adapted seedlings selected specifically for eastern Nebraska conditions.

For plantings of 150 trees or more, the NRD, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), offers professional design and planting services to ensure you select the correct trees to meet your needs.

Financial assistance is available for qualified landowners through the NRD's Land Treatment Program or through your local NRCS office. The NRD cost-share rate is 75% of the estimated or actual cost (whichever is less), minus other cost-share funds, with a maximum of $10,000 per year.

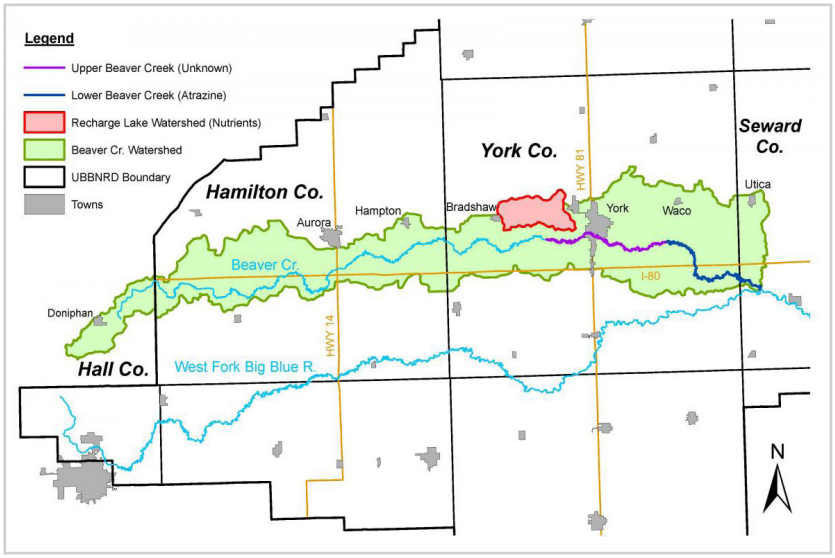
For more information about tree care, programs, cost-share, or orders, visit **www.upperbigblue.org/trees** or contact Raymond Asamoah, Conservation Forester, at (402) 362-6601. The Upper Big Blue NRD partners with the Nebraska Forest Service to fund the conservation forester position, which provides district residents with one-on-one assistance for windbreak and tree-planting needs.

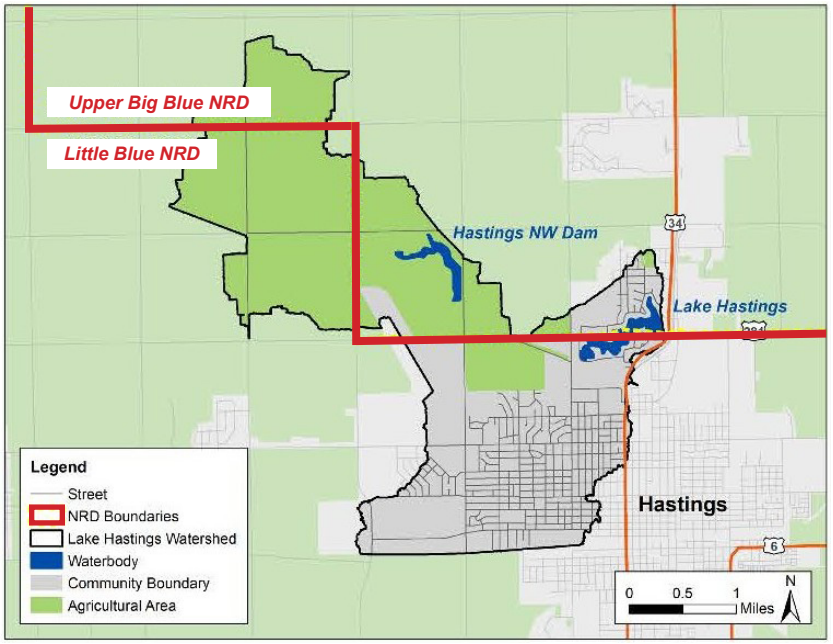


(SAVE YOUR SOIL - INCENTIVE PROGRAM UPDATES...continued from page 2)

The WQMP was prepared in order to guide the Upper Big Blue NRD in developing and implementing future projects and programs to improve water quality, hydrology, and aquatic resources within the NRD. The WQMP also serves as a basis for seeking financial support for those projects and programs.

The WQMP was adopted by the Environmental Protection Agency in March 2020. Since then, the Upper Big Blue NRD has been incrementally implementing the plan, which has included establishing WQMP incentive programs for certain soil conservation practices used within defined target areas. These practices include cover crops, buffer strips, and land treatment projects that prevent or reduce soil erosion, sedimentation, and water contamination. **Target areas** include the Beaver Creek Watershed which encompasses Recharge Lake (*above right*); the Lake Hastings Watershed **within** the Upper Big Blue NRD boundary (*center right*); and municipal Wellhead Protection Areas that have an approved Wellhead Protection Plan (*bottom right*).





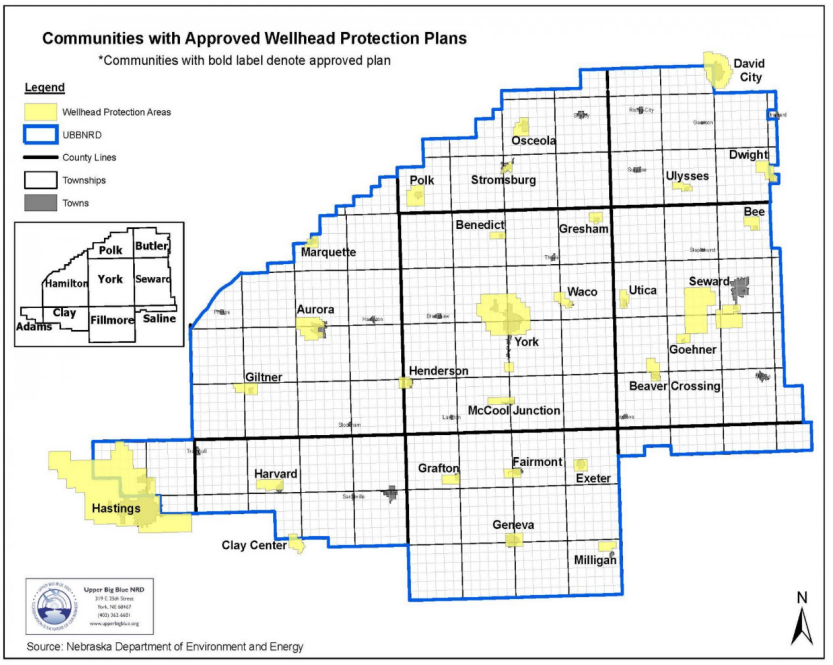
The cover crop, buffer strip, and land treatment incentive programs can change periodically depending on available funding, participation rates, identified needs, project outcomes, and other factors. In the past year, changes were made to the cover crop program and the Lake Hastings Watershed was added as a target area.

COVER CROP PROGRAM - AN EXTRA YEAR

Landowners interested in using cover crops to build soil health will have an extra year to complete their five-year commitment. Earlier this year, the Upper Big Blue NRD Board of Directors approved changes to the cover crop program that allows participants to utilize cover crops for five seasons over a six-year term. This gives participants a little flexibility and the option to skip one year when rotating crops or if they feel the current moisture and precipitation conditions are not conducive for planting cover crops that year.

Improving soil health using cover crops is a multi-year process; it typically doesn't happen over one growing season. Therefore, the one-year program funded by the NRD was eliminated in order to encourage participants to continue using cover crops over a longer period of time to achieve the desired results.

There are numerous proverbs and quotes about planting trees that allude to the fact that they are an investment in the future. In other words, people don't



plant trees and expect to reap the benefits immediately. It takes several years of caring for trees and allowing them to grow before the investment pays off.

A similar mindset should be used in regard to planting cover crops to build soil health. The full spectrum of benefits are seen over time, not after one year. Cover crops are proven to reduce wind and water erosion, increase soil organic matter, suppress weeds, manage soil moisture, improve yields, reduce herbicide and pesticide use, and create grazing opportunities, among other things.

The Upper Big Blue NRD cover crop program includes a tiered cost-share rate, with a maximum of $7,500 per operator/landowner per year.

- 1st & 2nd years = $50/acre
- 3rd year = $40/acre
- 4th & 5th years = $30/acre

Years do not need to be consecutive. Under the new regulations, participants have six years to complete their five-year commitment.

To be eligible for the Upper Big Blue NRD cover crop program, land where cover crops will be planted must be within a designated target area *(see page 6)*. Other requirements also apply.

LAKE HASTINGS WATERSHED - NEWEST TARGET AREA

The **Lake Hastings Watershed Implementation Plan (LHWIP)** was developed through a collaborative effort between the Nebraska Department of Water, Energy, and Environment, the City of Hastings, the Little Blue NRD, and the Upper Big Blue NRD. JEO Consulting Group led the process and prepared the plan, which is designed to guide the project partners in improving water quality and aquatic resources within Lake Hastings and its watershed. The LHWIP was added to the Upper Big Blue NRD WQMP and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency in 2024.

In 2026, the Upper Big Blue NRD Board of Directors approved the Lake Hastings Watershed as a target area of the WQMP. This designation made Lake Hastings Watershed landowners **within** the Upper Big Blue NRD eligible for increased cost-share funding for conservation practices such as land treatment projects, cover crops, and buffer strips. Implementation of these projects is guided by technical assistance provided by the NRCS, but is funded directly by the Upper Big Blue NRD.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the WQMP Incentive Program, visit: **www.upperbigblue.org/wqmp**. For questions or additional information please call the Hastings NRCS Office at 402-463-6771 or the Upper Big Blue NRD at 402-362-6601. ♦♦♦

(PEER-TO-PEER EDUCATION...continued from page 2)

reducing inputs. Additionally, his focus on adaptive multi-paddock grazing allows him to more closely align his livestock management with natural processes. Like all the mentors, he is passionate about peer-to-peer education, enjoys sharing his experiences, and encourages farmers interested in implementing conservation practices to reach out.

Other Network mentors focus on different conservation practices, such as buffer strips, grassed waterways, multi-species grazing, nutrient management, organic transition, ranching, relay cropping, small grains, vegetable production, water management, wildlife habitat, and more.

Whether you're interested in sharing your knowledge as a mentor or learning from others as a participant, the Network offers opportunities to connect over conservation. For more information or to join the Network, visit the website at **https://neconservationmentorshipnetwork.org** or contact Andrew Tonnies at (402) 590-7096 or andrewt@cfra.org. ♦♦♦

MORE ABOUT THE NEBRASKA CONSERVATION MENTORSHIP NETWORK

Engagement: Come as you are.

- The Network is producer-led, allowing for spontaneity and flexibility.
- Participants choose the level of time and energy they wish to invest.
- It is designed to meet producers where they are.

Eligibility: Who can participate?

- Producers of all experience levels are welcome.
- Participants should be interested in and willing to implement conservation practices.
- Individuals must be in Nebraska and operate (or directly influence management decisions of) a farm or ranch.

Benefits: Why join the network?

- Receive invitations to field days, farm tours, and small-group discussions.
- Gain access to one-on-one mentorship.
- Meet with like-minded producers to discuss conservation practices and programs.
- Exchange ideas through an online group.
- Participation is free.

Events: Connect and learn.

- Participating in field days, farm tours, and small group discussions is voluntary.
- Participants are encouraged to attend and connect with other producers as their schedules permit.



Conservation Programs for Flood-Prone Acres

The content of this article was reproduced with permission from our partners at the Rainwater Basin Joint Venture and includes information from the NRCS's WREP website. For information or to watch the YouTube videos with landowner testimonials, visit https://www.rwbjv.org/rainwater-basin-programs/wrep-program-signup/

Do you own cropland acres that are prone to flooding? Do you have acres that require replanting after heavy rains? Do pivots on your property get stuck? Do you want to improve wildlife habitat? If you answered "yes" to any or all of these questions, there is a conservation program that may be of interest to you.

The **Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** is funded through the Farm Bill and provides a variety of options for flood-prone cropland or wetland acres. One program option is the **Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP).**

The WREP is a voluntary program through which the NRCS enters into agreements with eligible partners to leverage resources to carry out high priority wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement projects. It enables effective integration of wetland restoration on working agricultural landscapes, providing meaningful benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program and to the communities where the wetlands exist.

The incentives offered through WREP and partnering entities support restoration costs, pivot modifications (e.g., flotation tires), grazing infrastructure (e.g., fencing and watering systems), and improved irrigation efficiency (e.g., variable rate irrigation components).

WREP provides landowners with:

- A financial incentive to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands for multiple uses and benefits.
- The flexibility to pass a pivot over enrolled acres to maintain optimal irrigation of the surrounding cropland.
- Technical assistance.

Restoring flood-prone cropland to wetlands not only improves net farm income, but the wetlands also:

- Improve water quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.
- Recharge the aquifer.
- Reduce flooding.
- Provide scientific, educational, and recreational opportunities.

Specifically, one acre of restored wetlands provides enough groundwater recharge to irrigate 3.5 acres of cropland with six inches of water, and can produce up to 9,000 pounds of forage.

If you want to learn more or you are ready to do something new with your flood-prone acres to benefit wildlife and your operation, contact Jerod Fling, Integrated Water Programs Specialist, at (402) 366-5272 or jfling@upperbigblue.org. ♦♦♦



"This low area was one that if it didn't flood out seemed like you lost revenue on it one way or another. The thing I'm most excited about is being able to graze this. It's been real exciting to see the waterfowl and pheasants come in. For me it was definitely worthwhile and I wouldn't hesitate to do it again."
~ Nick Happold, Hall County



"With the pounds of beef I could grow as opposed to planting a field two or three or four times a year because of flooding, this made a lot more sense. Financially it was an easy decision to make. Ducks and cattle can go hand-in-hand and they can work together."
~ Hank McGowan, Fillmore County



"Wildlife has to have a home and we need to preserve what's left. It's farmable, but it just does not produce every year and your inputs are wasted. It's a lot less work and less tearing up of equipment getting the hard acres out of production. [The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture] had a good program and it works."
~ Gayle Marsh, Hamilton County

ONE RED

YOUR LAND YOUR PLAN

WHAT IS ONE RED?

The ONE RED Ag Data Bank & Grants Program is being rolled out by the Nebraska Department of Water Energy, and Environment (DWEE) in partnership with Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) and Precision Conservation Management. DWEE received a federal grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to fund the program, which is designed to help producers improve nitrogen use efficiency and soil health, manage irrigation, and invest in technologies that support their operations, all while protecting Nebraska's water resources.

With flexible funding options, incentives for sharing farm data, and support through local NRDs, the program aims to meet producers where they are and help them take the next step in conservation by providing opportunities that fit a wide range of operations.

WHY PARTICIPATE?

ONE RED is designed to help improve farm value and increase profitability by supporting innovation and education. Benefits include support for nitrogen and/or water management, access to approved equipment and technology opportunities, and financial incentives tied to eligible fields and acres.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Nebraska farmers growing corn, soybeans, sorghum, or canola who have at least 80 cumulative acres within an eligible area (wellhead protection, source water protection, NRD Phase II or higher management areas, or certified irrigated acres) are eligible to participate.

Participation is voluntary and farmer-led. Participants decide which eligible fields, acres, opportunities, and activities to pursue. The number of people who can participate is limited by available funding.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENROLL?

To enroll farmers will need to provide the following:

- ONE RED Ag Data Bank Application
- W-9 and ACH form for payment setup
- Field locations and acreage
- Crop type, yield, cover crop, and tillage data
- Total applied nitrogen information
- Applied water information
- Soil, water, and manure* samples (*if applicable)

ARE THERE ACRE LIMITS?

There is a minimum of 80 acres and a maximum of 1,000 acres that can be enrolled per individual. Acres must be in eligible areas (refer to "Who Can Participate?").

WHAT FUNDING IS AVAILABLE?

Throughout the program, which ends after the 2029 growing season, eligible producers could receive up to $17,000 for dryland operations and up to $23,000 for irrigated operations.

Ag Data Bank - up to $5,000 for enrolling with initial data submission and participation in subsequent years through 2029; opens in November 2026.

Grants Program - up to $10,000 in grants for nitrogen management (on corn), soil health practices, or equipment & technology upgrades, plus a per acre bonus ($2 for dryland and $5 for irrigated acres) on up to 1,000 acres. Farmers who irrigate can also receive an additional $3,000 for water management. Scheduled to open in January 2027.

ARE ONE RED PROGRAM BENEFITS STACKABLE?

NRD, state programs, and some federal programs are stackable with ONE RED. Check with program providers. Other federal, state, and local cost-share payments should be applied first. ONE RED reimbursement will be based on actual eligible costs.

WHO OWNS, SEES, AND USES MY DATA?

You retain ownership and control of your data. Participating in ONE RED does not transfer ownership of data to the program, the state, or your approved service provider. The state nor the public can see individual data. The state is only able to see and use aggregated and de-identified, county-based data. Farm-level operational data will not be used in public reporting.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

The ONE RED website has all the information you need. Visit https://oneredag.com to learn more and click on any of the I'm Interested links or buttons to get started.

The Upper Big Blue NRD is a ONE RED "Approved Service Provider." Contact Drew ten Bensel at (402) 362-6601 or dtenbensel@upperbigblue.org for local support regarding ONE RED. ♦♦♦

Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund Invests in Nebraska's Future Soil Health Leaders

The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund (DGSHF) continues to strengthen Nebraska agriculture through investments in youth engagement, farmer innovation, and hands-on soil health education.

Over the past year, the fund has supported projects advancing regenerative agriculture, water infiltration, soil biology, biodiversity, and agricultural education—helping producers, students, and communities explore practical solutions that improve soil resilience, water quality, and long-term farm sustainability.

Among the fund's recent investments was support for a student-led soil health research project through Battle Creek FFA. Working alongside sixth-generation farmer Jeremy Grant, students studied the environmental and economic impacts of various farming systems, including no-till and cover cropping practices. Their research revealed dramatically improved water infiltration in soils managed with no-till and cover crops compared to conventional tillage, helping students connect scientific research to real-world agricultural outcomes.

"This project hopes to answer the question of how soil health practices make sense not only environmentally, but economically," said Grant. "Students are helping put measurable data behind what many producers have observed for years."

The impact of this project extended far beyond the students involved. In January, Battle Creek FFA members presented their findings at the No-Till on the Plains Conference, sharing their research with soil health leaders and agricultural experts from across the region. The data generated through the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund-supported project also served as the foundation for their presentation at the Nebraska FFA Agriscience Fair, where the team advanced to the national competition held this October.

DGSHF also partnered with Green Cover to support soil health-related projects at the Central Nebraska Science and Engineering Fair, recognizing student research at the middle and high school levels in areas such as no-till farming, water conservation, and regenerative agriculture.

In addition to youth research, the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund continues to support producer-led innovation. A recent grant to southeast Nebraska organic farmer Barry Young is helping evaluate alternative methods of establishing cereal rye cover crops during corn production to improve soil function and cropping outcomes.



Randy Pryor (left) and Gary Lesoing (right) of the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund Advisory Committee present a $2,000 grant to southeast Nebraska organic farmer Barry Young (center). The grant supports Young's research evaluating alternative methods of establishing cereal rye cover crops during corn production to improve soil health, soil function, and cropping outcomes.

"Receiving this grant will ease the burden of daring to be different," Young said. "Repairing our soil ecosystems requires patience, thought, and financial support."

Thanks to the generosity of individual and corporate donors—including WK Kellogg Co and Cargill—the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund will increase its maximum grant award to $2,500 for the next grant cycle, which has an **application deadline of March 1, 2027**. This support enables DGSHF to continue investing in the next generation of soil health leaders while advancing practical, producer-focused solutions that strengthen Nebraska agriculture, communities, and natural resources.

"We're proud to continue our partnership with the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund and support its expanded grant program," said Sarah Ludmer, Chief Wellbeing and Sustainable Business Officer, WK Kellogg Co.

"Investing in soil health and agricultural education helps create opportunities for the next generation of agricultural leaders and we're excited to see these grants helping bring new innovative ideas and learning opportunities to life."

ABOUT THE DAN GILLESPIE SOIL HEALTH FUND

The Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund honors Dan Gillespie, a life-long farmer and long-time no-till farming practitioner and advocate, by raising funds and making grants to support soil health. The fund is dedicated to education and educational practices related to soil health and regenerative agriculture, including but not limited to no-till farming, water conservation, tree conservation, and planting cover crops.

Grants from this Fund may support educational events and programming for youth, current farmers and ranchers, and others involved in agriculture. The geographic focus of the Fund is Nebraska and surrounding states. A volunteer Fund Advisory Committee works actively to increase charitable giving and award grants to causes and projects that are addressing emerging needs and future opportunities to educate, inform, and support healthy soil practices. Established in 2021, the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund is an affiliated fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation.



For more information about the Dan Gillespie Soil Health Fund or to support its mission, visit **www.nebcommfound.org/give/dan-gillespie-soil-health-fund**. ♦♦♦

Left: Producers at the 2024 Regenerative Agriculture Conference spoke about conservation practices they use in their operations to improve soil health. There was no fee to attend the conference thanks in part to a grant received from the DGSHF.

Did You Change...

- ☐ Number or location of irrigated acres?
- ☐ Fields you own?
- ☐ Fields you operate?
- ☐ Tenants?
- ☐ Water wells you control?

Changes & Transfers

If So...

Call DeeDee Novotny at (402) 362-6601 ext. 215 to report changes within 60 days as required by Upper Big Blue NRD Rule 5 - Groundwater Management.

Groundwater transfers across survey section lines need to be APPROVED by the Upper Big Blue NRD Board of Directors PRIOR to the transfer.

The groundwater transfer application form is available on our website at: https://www.upperbigblue.org/groundwater-transfer-application. Groundwater transfer regulations can be found in Upper Big Blue NRD Rule 5, Chapter 13.

(WATER LEVELS...continued from page 1)

Groundwater allocation rules and regulations were set by the Board of Directors in 1978 and have been updated several times since then. The goal is to keep the groundwater level at or above the 1978 level, which serves as the "Allocation Trigger." If the average water level falls below the 1978 level, groundwater allocation will begin.

In order to prevent the need for a regulated allocation, producers are adopting best management practices for irrigation, implementing conservation practices to improve infiltration, and using technology to use water efficiently. The Upper Big Blue NRD sells irrigation management tools, such as moisture sensors, handheld meters, data loggers, evapotranspiration gauges, and soil probes at a fifty-percent (50%) discount.

If you have questions about water levels, irrigation scheduling equipment, or allocation, contact the NRD Water Department at (402) 362-6601. ♦♦♦

UPPER BIG BLUE
Natural Resources District
Protecting Lives • Protecting Property • Protecting the Future

319 E. 25th Street
York, Nebraska 68467
402-362-6601
www.upperbigblue.org

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Mark Your Calendar



Conservation Tree Sales

November 2026 - March 2027

www.upperbigblue.org/tree-program



Irrigation Water Use Reports Due

December 1, 2026

www.upperbigblue.org/reporting



Nitrogen Management Certification Trainings

December 1, 2026
10:00 a.m.
Bremer Community Center
1604 L Street
Aurora, Nebraska

December 15, 2026
2:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m.
Upper Big Blue NRD Office
319 East 25th Street
York, Nebraska





Regenerative Agriculture Conference

Coming First Quarter of 2027

www.upperbigblue.org/events



Phase II & III / Hastings WPGMA Reports Due

April 1, 2027

www.upperbigblue.org/reporting