



Winter 2013

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Tri-Basin Topics

A quarterly publication of Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

Holdrege Water Conference to Focus on Drought Conditions

The drought conditions plaguing Nebraska will be the focus of the 2013 Holdrege Water Conference. The annual event will be held Thursday, January 31, 2013 at the Phelps County Ag Center. A free lunch will be provided for those attending. The program should conclude around 3 p.m. The conference is sponsored by Tri-Basin Natural Resources District, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, UNL Extension and Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce.

Sessions at the conference will focus on water-related issues that affect agricultural producers in central Nebraska. The schedule is still being finalized, but several speakers have already been confirmed.

Author and photographer Bill Ganzel will be the keynote speaker during lunch. Ganzel's book, *Dust Bowl Descent*, features interviews with Dust Bowl survivors.

Chuck Burr, UNL Extension Educator at the West Central Research & Extension Center, will discuss his work in irrigation management research. He will also focus on irrigation practices in extreme conditions.

Bill Kranz is an Associate Professor and Extension Irrigation Specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL).

His session will focus on irrigation management through variations in center pivot sprinkler packages.

Curtis Scheele, Irrigation Water Management Specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, will discuss irrigation management, specifically on-going projects and efforts in Tri-Basin NRD.

Ken Dewey, Professor of Applied Climate Sciences at UNL, will discuss Nebraska weather and climate in relation to production agriculture.

Mike Clements, General Manager of Lower Republican Natural Resources District, will conduct a session explaining the Lincoln Farm streamflow augmentation project.

A session on water availability for the 2013 growing season will round out the day. It will feature a report from Cory Steinke, Civil Engineer with Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, on surface water in Tri-Basin NRD. John Thorburn, General Manager of Tri-Basin NRD, will report on groundwater levels.

Area agri-businesses will display their products and services at the water conference and have representatives on hand to visit with conference participants. Producers in Tri-Basin NRD's Phase 2 or Phase 3 areas of the Groundwater Quality Management Area will receive recertification credit for attending the conference.

For a complete schedule of Water Conference speakers, check Tri-Basin NRD's website, www.tribasinprd.org, a few weeks prior to the event.

Holdrege
Water
Conference



"Dedicated to Conservation of our Natural Resources"

<http://www.tribasinprd.org>



Manager's Message

by John Thorburn

Federal Farm Bill Has Local Impact

Like many Americans, I'm frustrated by the partisan gridlock that has become business as usual in Washington, D.C. Even more frustrating to me, however, is the attitude that many of my fellow citizens have about our federal govern-

ment, our fellow citizens who work as civil servants, and the services that they provide to us and our Nation. "Nothing good comes out of Washington!" is a cliché that I've grown very tired of hearing.

As an example, one good thing that comes out of Washington every few years is the federal Farm Bill. The farm bill is a collection of a wide variety of programs related to food, agriculture, rural development and soil, water and wildlife habitat conservation. Partisan wrangling has stalled the next farm bill, however, and that's bad news for everyone.

The majority of funding in the so-called "farm bill" is dedicated to a nutrition program called "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" (SNAP), that helps millions of men, women and children, including nearly 178,000 Nebraskans, to get nutritious food. Making sure that our fellow citizens don't go hungry is a good thing, and it's a function of government that we should all support.

The program isn't perfect, and there are reports of fraud, but fraud rates have dramatically declined since the new electronic benefits system was put in place in 2009. By the way, changes are proposed in the Senate version of the new farm bill that would make it easy for people who receive SNAP benefits to buy locally grown fruits and vegetables at farmer's markets.

"Farmers don't need government subsidies" is another common refrain from farm bill critics. Perhaps surprisingly, most farmers would agree with that statement. Direct subsidies to farmers were dramatically reduced in the last two farm bills, and might be eliminated altogether in the new farm bill.

What our farmers and our nation need is a stable agricultural sector. The federal government can't promise stability, but it can provide tools that farmers can use to insure that they won't be wiped out by droughts and floods. Federally-guaranteed crop insurance products, which are sold to farmers by local insurance agents, provide critical protection against disasters.

Another key tool is some sort of minimum price guarantee that insures that farmers won't be ruined by price drops that are out of their control. As we finish a third consecutive harvest in which commodity prices hover near record levels, its easy to forget that farmers struggled with low commodity prices for most of the past 30 years.

If we get more favorable weather next year, combined with inevitable increases in corn and soybean production worldwide, its very unlikely that crop prices will be as high in 2013 as they've been recently. Farmers can still make money if corn prices drop from the current price of around \$7.25 a bushel down to on \$6 a bushel, but a price drop back to 2006 levels of \$2.50 a bushel would be calamitous. Such a price drop would not just put many farmers out of business, it would create strong incentives for farmers to plant other crops, reducing the size of succeeding corn harvests. That would create another corn shortage and another wide price swing. Wild market gyrations are bad for farmers, bad for the industries that process farm products, and bad for consumers that buy those products.



Agriculture, industry and consumers all benefit every day from the current farm bill. Soil and water conservation programs provide benefits to another important group: the next generation. One of the primary driving forces that led to the first farm bill (the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933) was the need for improved soil and water conservation during the "Dust Bowl" era. Ironically, all conservation programs com-

combined currently receive less than nine percent of total farm bill funds, and that percentage is likely to decline even further in the next farm bill. That said, a small percentage of a large amount is still a lot of money.

Landowners and producers in the three counties in Tri-Basin NRD (Gosper, Phelps and Kearney) received \$2.9 million in 149 contracts with USDA in federal fiscal year 2012. This money was used to help farmers increase their irrigation efficiency, reduce soil erosion and improve the condition of pastures and range land. Small amounts of money also went to help plant trees and establish and improve grasslands and wetlands for wildlife. These conservation efficiency improvements saved millions of gallons of irrigation water and reduced soil erosion by hundreds of thousands of tons last year alone, right here in South-Central Nebraska.

Farm bill programs are good for everyone, not just farmers. Our federal representatives need to end partisan gridlock and make a good faith effort to negotiate a new farm bill that insures those benefits will continue to provide food security and prosperity for all Americans today and tomorrow.

Haying Project Benefits Wildfire Victims

The City of Holdrege, in collaboration with Tri-Basin Natural Resources District and local sponsors, provided much-needed livestock feed to ranchers affected by the wildfires in north central Nebraska this fall. Native grass from Lake Seldom, just south of Holdrege, was windrowed and baled, producing 130 bales of native grass hay that was donated to ranchers in the Ainsworth area.

Lake Seldom is a natural wetland area owned by the City of Holdrege and maintained by the city and Tri-Basin NRD. It consists of over 230 acres that has been set aside as wildlife habitat and a recreational and educational area. The grass from just 22 of those acres was cut to produce the 130 bales of hay, leaving plenty of habitat to protect and feed wildlife throughout the winter months.

Charles Brooks, Land Resources Manager at Tri-Basin NRD, coordinated the donation process. Currently, those who are helping with the project through services or donations are: CHS Agri Service Center; RDO, Inc.; RSK Trucking, LLC; Landmark Implement; Creston Fertilizer; Central Valley Irrigation; Nebraskaland Aviation; Wells Flying Service; Fairbanks International-Case; Holdrege Irrigation; Nebraska Ag Specialties; and Livestock Feeders Service. Any additional sponsors will be recognized in future issues of *Tri-Basin Topics*.



Trees for Newborns

Each year Tri-Basin NRD honors newborns in the district with the gift of a seedling tree. These trees are available to the family of any child born in Gosper, Phelps or Kearney County since the previous tree season (April). You can reserve a baby tree for your newest family member by calling our office at (308) 995-6688 or 1-877-995-6688 or by emailing the baby's name, birthdate, parents' names, address and phone number to esmith@tribasinnrd.org. We will send you a postcard in April letting you know when and where to pick up your tree. If you have any questions, please call our office and ask for Esther.



Chemigation and Nitrogen Management Recertification

Tri-Basin NRD will be sending out renewal forms during the first part of January to producers who had chemigation permits last year. Those producers whose chemigation certification has expired will receive notification from our office and will need to attend one of the chemigation training sessions held in February and March. Training sessions have not yet been scheduled. For more information about the training schedule, check the Department of Environmental Quality's website at www.deq.state.ne.us or call your local UNL Extension office. Producers who need to add new chemigation permits for the 2013 season should contact the Tri-Basin NRD office.

Producers in Phase 2 and Phase 3 areas of the Groundwater Quality Management Area also need to have current Nitrogen Management training. If your certification has expired, you should receive notification from our office. For more information about the Nitrogen Management Training schedule, contact Tri-Basin NRD toll-free at 1-877-995-6688.

Nitrogen Reports Due

Nitrogen Management Reports for the 2012 crop year were due December 31, 2012 for producers in Phase 2 and Phase 3 of the Tri-Basin Groundwater Quality Management Area. If you have fields in the Phase 2 or Phase 3 areas and have not turned in your reports yet, please do so as soon as possible. If you need reporting forms or help filling them out, please contact the Tri-Basin NRD office.



Winter 2013

Tri-Basin Topics

Non-Profit Permit
U. S. Postage
PAID
Holdrege, NE 68949
Permit No. 220

Tri-Basin Natural Resources District

1723 Burlington St. Holdrege, NE 68949

(308) 995-6688

email: tribasin@tribasinprd.org

www.tribasinprd.org

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Nebraska's NRDs: Protecting Lives, Protecting Property, Protecting the Future

CALENDAR

January 15.....NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*

January 21... NRD Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 31 Holdrege Water Conference

February 12NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*

February 18NRD Closed for Presidents' Day

March 12.....NRD Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.*

April 9.....NRD Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m.*

* Times are tentative. All meetings are at TBNRD office in Holdrege unless otherwise noted.

TRI-BASIN NRD BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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A mailing list is maintained and requests to be placed on the list should be sent to the above address. Comments and suggestions may be addressed to the General Manager.

Get Tri-Basin Topics in your inbox instead of your mailbox!

To request an electronic version of this newsletter, send an email nsalisbury@tribasinprd.org.

TRI-BASIN NATURAL RESOURCES DISTRICT 2013 HAND PLANT ORDER FORM

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP: _____ PHONE: _____

ORDERS MUST BE IN MULTIPLES OF 25 at \$16.20 per bundle.

Tree Order Deadline is April 1, 2013.

QUANTITY	SPECIES
	CONIFERS
	AUSTRIAN PINE
	REDCEDAR (EASTERN)
	BLACK HILLS SPRUCE
	COLORADO BLUE SPRUCE
	PONDEROSA PINE
	BROADLEAFS
	BLACK WALNUT
	BUR OAK
	HACKBERRY
	RED OAK
	SHRUBS
	AMERICAN PLUM
	COTTONEASTER
	CHOKECHERRY
	LILAC
	SAND CHERRY
	SKUNKBUSH SUMAC
	Total # of Trees
	Multiply total # of trees x .65
	Mulch x .35/foot
	Subtotal
	Tax (Holdrege 7%, Elwood 6%, Minden 6.5%)
	TOTAL AMOUNT DUE/PAID

Tree Pickup will be at: _____ Tri-Basin NRD _____ Minden NRCS _____ Elwood NRCS

WHY PLANT A WINDBREAK?

Windbreaks and shelterbelts provide many benefits. Windbreaks planted along field boundaries reduce soil erosion by reducing wind velocity. Shelterbelts planted around farmsteads reduce heating costs in homes and shop buildings. Shelterbelts can protect livestock from blizzards and serve as "living snow fences." Trees and shrubs also provide food, shelter and nesting habitat for many species of birds and mammals.

NRD TREE & SHRUB PLANTINGS

Contact the NRD Office or your county NRCS for help with determining the type and number of trees and shrubs you need. The technician will make arrangements for the tree order and planting service. The NRD will plant the trees according to the plan.

Trees are planted in the spring as soon as conditions are suitable. The NRD tree planting crew will notify landowners of the approximate date and time of planting.

SITE PREPARATION

Good site preparation is a key to rapid tree growth and survival. The best site preparation begins the year before the trees are planted. On heavier soils, working the ground to kill competing vegetation is an excellent method of preparing the site. The technician assisting in planning a windbreak or habitat plot can advise you about the type of site preparation needed. The technician can also help you determine if herbicide carryover will be a problem.

WEED CONTROL

Weed control in the form of plastic mulch is available through the district. This woven material is installed over the trees after planting. Slots are then cut for the trees. Plastic mulch not only eliminates weeds but also helps to preserve soil moisture.

PRICES

Trees & Shrubs..... 65¢ each/multiples of 25

PLANTING SERVICE

Tree planting (no mulch) 50¢/ft

Trees, tree planting, mulch and mulch laying..... \$ 1.15/ft

Drip tape 35¢/ft

Pull-in Charge..... \$20

Renovations..... \$200

Shrub thickets..... \$200

Minimum plan charge \$350 per planting

PLASTIC MULCH

Material Only 35¢ per ft

Stakes..... 15¢ each

Seedling Tubes..... \$1.10 each

Prices are subject to change.

PLANTING YOUR OWN TREES

You can order trees and shrubs at the NRD or your local NRCS Office. Orders must be in multiples of 25 per species. We will send you a postcard when your trees arrive.

DRIP TAPE

Tri-Basin has subsurface "drip tape" available for watering trees planted by the District. The water source could be a portable tank or a hydrant. Check with the TBNRD Land Resource Coordinator for more information.

COST-SHARE

Tri-Basin NRD offers cost-share funds for tree plantings and plastic mulch installation. You should apply at your county NRCS office before March 1.

All sites must be properly prepared before planting to qualify for cost-share. Reimbursement is made only after full payment is received. The minimum total cost of plantings eligible for cost-share is \$500.

Cost-share may also be available from your county USDA office. Pheasants Forever and Nebraska Game & Parks Commission also offer programs for wildlife habitat improvement. NRCS staff can help you determine which programs have funds available and best suit your needs.

BILLING ON NRD PLANTINGS

Tri-Basin NRD bills for trees/tree planting service after completion. Full payment is due upon receipt of the billing. Cost-share forms will not be finalized until payment is received at the Tri-Basin or NRCS office.